

I am a retired Disability Rights Advocate. I retired onto Social Security Disability when my breast cancer was found to have metastasized to my bones, and later, to my liver.

I have been very fortunate. It has been nearly eight years since the cancer spread; my prognosis was approximately two years. I am what is known as NED, which stands for "no evidence of disease" being found in my current scans. This is a not uncommon occurrence; however, in 49 out of 50 cases of metastatic breast cancer, active disease returns and the patient dies. So I know I'm living on borrowed time.

I am also fortunate in that I have never had any pain from my cancer, although bone mets, as we call them, usually cause severe pain. Chemo for my original cancer was no picnic, but since then I have had nothing but fatigue from my treatments.

I'm thinking of my friend Harriet from Worcester, who was not so lucky. She lived less than two years after her mets were diagnosed. She was unable to tolerate most of the treatments, and suffered from severe nausea. She wanted so badly to spend more years with her husband, but after a long, heartfelt talk with her Unitarian minister, felt that she could bear no more, and decided to stop treatment.

She went into a hospice, where palliative treatment continued to be given to try to help her nausea. She said to her husband, "It'll only be a couple of days, now." She couldn't wait for her suffering to be over, and she died about a week after entering the hospice program.

I belong to several internet groups for breast cancer patients. Most want to live. But some do stop treatment due to pain or other symptoms. It just seems wrong that they should have to suffer until cancer takes them. They should have the choice to "go gentle into that good night" if they desire.

I want the choice. I do not want to suffer with pain or severe nausea. I deserve to choose whether or not to go a little early.

This is only one person's point of view, but I hope it helps. People deserve a choice.

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